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USES AND ABUSES OF HISTORICAL ANALOGIES: NOT MUNICH BUT GREECE*

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Analogic historical thinking can and does have a vital function in the scholarly study of contemporary history as well as in the formation of considered political judgments. In any effort to comprehend and give shape to events that are still in flux, careful students and makers of contemporary history isolate similarities and contrasts with past situations whose completed scenario seems to provide significant points de repère. The purpose of analogic procedures is not to predict the course of events. Rather, the aim is to design a context within which to order and examine developments which in addition to being in flux are only partially documented. Without such a context it is difficult if not impossible to formulate meaningful questions for either analysis or decision, since discrete parts do not explain the whole but a vision of the whole is required in order to make sense of the parts. In this current era of world history both positive and negative analogies (in the non-normative sense) are particularly useful in providing the distance and perspective needed to see any given nation's problems "parallel with and in relation to world historical developments and their laws, as part of universal history (Burckhardt)."

The danger of abuses arises in historical writing as well as in politics when analogies are used to persuade, to incite, to alarm, to defame, and to exalt rather than to orient, to clarify, and to stimulate critical thought.

To be sure, abuses perpetrated -- intentionally or unintentionally -- by professional historians qua historians have a limited range of influence and can be relatively swiftly and easily exploded by scholarly criticism. But when statesmen, politicians, and action intellectuals -- including action historians -- press into service politically motivated and intended analogic arguments, these tend to lose their innocuous and ephemeral qualities. To achieve their purposes political actors couch analogies in a variety of rhetorical forms, all depending on the segment of the attentive general public they seek to reach. They harness them to create emotional cues in the public mind, cues which can be manipulated to produce the standard effects of political persuasion, reinforcement, and mobilization. The result may bear the name and the appearance of history, but in actual fact, as Croce warned, it is "not history but a practical stimulant which satisfies needs other than those of knowledge."

Once lodged in the public mind a politically intended historical analogy -- whether in the form of a prototypal prudential or exemplary exhortation -- becomes resistant to correction and refinement. Carl Becker reminded us and many contemporary politicians and publicists know only too well that Mr. Everyman is not concerned with documentation, contextual truth or ultimate causes. In this closing third of the twentieth century this lack of concern even among the most cultivated and independent-minded voters is likely to be exceptionally acute. In America professional and professorial historians are viewed with the same scorn and impatience as those other scholars and intellectuals whose attention to detail and skepticism of power

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continue to be caricatured so mercilessly. When cavilling at the loose use of analogies, they face the additional obstacle that their method of explanation clashes with the culturally and ideologically validated concept of history as biography and as epic struggle between good guys and bad guys. In other words, history as morality story and as individual decision is compatible with the prevailing climate of opinion.

I am not saying that analytic and sociological history need or can only be written and talked about in a specialized and non-literary vocabulary and idiom. I do insist, however, that in addition to facing the usual obstacles to gaining a hearing from Mr. Everyman, the rising generation of professorial historians faces the problem of communicating concerns, questions, emphases, and methods which have not yet jelled into a new paradigm of historical explanation, which have not yet crystallized into a systematic context of inquiry.

Not surprisingly, that rare Mr. Everyman who ventures to verify the explanatory value of his analogic baggage faces a formidable task. At the present time, when the Johnson Administration uses the prudential analogy of Munich to justify its policy in Vietnam there are, of course, a great many aspects of Munich that historians, regardless of approach, generation, and persuasion tend to be agreed upon: the nature of Nazi German objectives, the degree of Anglo-French military unpreparedness, the popularly-supposed remoteness of Czechoslovakia, the debilitating political legacy of Versailles, and the resulting encouragement to Hitler. But this agreement wears thin when it comes to explaining, interpreting, and evaluating the mainsprings of appeasement. The point to note, though, is that disagreements about the causal and motivational aspects of British and French policy are not exclusively or even primarily a function of the historian's personal point of view. Admittedly, to postulate that the principal English and French decision makers were predisposed to yield to Nazi German pressure by their resolve to contain Bolshevism abroad and progressive reform at home is in the nature of a value-laden hypothesis about the taproots of appeasement. But if the nature of this proclivity and its impact on policy are to be examined, the constricting framework of orthodox diplomatic history must be abandoned. In a newly emerging context of analysis diplomatic negotiations as reflected in foreign office dispatches or releases and in ambassadors' diaries or memoirs will cease to be the primary focus of attention. Instead, the emphasis will fall heavily on the making of foreign policy prior to its being fed into the diplomatic and military machinery, particular care being taken to probe those points at which domestic affairs intersect with foreign policy, military preparedness, and diplomacy. This Problemstellung calls for an investigation of party, pressure, and interest politics; of the social origins, status, and world views of the principal political and foreign policy actors; and of the Allied statesmen's and their advisers' conception of the relationship of foreign policy and domestic politics in their own countries, in Germany, in Soviet Russia, and in the countries of the Eastern European rimland.

It would appear, then, that when it comes to correcting politically premeditated historical analogies Mr. Everyman's impatience with refinements in interpretation is not the only or even the major obstacle. Would-be scholar-correctors work under the dual handicap that contextual, causal, and analytic qualifications do not lend themselves to brief, uncomplicated, and racy formulations and that among themselves historians continue to have sharp disagreements -- valuational as well as paradigmatic -- about the meaning of Munich.

But there is one further difficulty. Even or perhaps especially in this secular age Mr. Everyman craves reassurance that history follows a patterned and discernible course. In his quest for direction he is predisposed to welcome and any government is inclined to provide reminders of past events or situations which make those of the present and future recognizable. This being the case he is likely to look askance at critics who question the legitimacy of the Munich analogy without proposing another or a better one to take its place. Particularly in the United States, where any critic of government is suspect if he refuses to make concrete remedial proposals, this failure reduces his effectiveness.

Indeed, so many critics leave the impression that anything short of a perfect analogy should be proscribed. But in the absence of perfect analogies, which exist only in the world of formal abstractions, this is equivalent to ruling out analogic arguments altogether. What, then, is an analogy? According to Webster it is "a relation of likeness between two things or one thing to or with another, consisting in the resemblance not of the things themselves but of two or more attributes, circumstances, or effects." In other words, analogy and identity are not synonymous. Reasoning by historical analogy consists of isolating two or more circumstances or processes which have quintessential structural, relational, and/or causal resemblances in a context of differences and indeterminancies, the resemblances being emphasized for the purpose of proceeding to the clarification of a situation, a process, or an effect which appears not to be characterized by unalloyed uniqueness.

At any rate, if E. H. Carr is right in saying that the current era is exceptionally history conscious and if today's Mr. Everyman has that pronounced need for and is peculiarly susceptible to analogies -- and these two points await empirical verification -- then any administration may be expected to harness only such analogies as will bolster up and justify its policies. Furthermore, government spokesmen and supporters -- as well as dissident action intellectuals -- will tend to violate the canons of sound analogic explanation: rather than give due weight to degrees of similarity or difference they will tend to speak in terms of immaculate identity or contrast.

The question arises not only as to how any given analogy achieves currency in decision making circles but also whether prior to becoming part of the government's justificatory rhetoric, it significantly influences the formulation of policy. Indeed, it may be worth examining the role of the action historian qua historian in this process. When invoking an analogy does his special expertise guarantee him a more respectful hearing than when an analogic argument is advanced by an action intellectual who can claim no expertise in historical scholarship? Even if this should be the case, the further question arises as to whether action historians become influential advisers at points in the power and government structure where fundamental decisions are made. Or do they, like the typical intellectual and expert, reach only those points at which they are instructed to provide implementational advice or, more commonly, justificatory metaphors (see Merton)? Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s role in the Kennedy Administration during both the Bay of Pigs operation and the Cuban missile crisis illustrates the narrow parameter of influence within which action historians, even at the highest level, tend to serve.

But whatever its origin, the Munich analogy has been pressed into service by the Johnson Administration in an effort to rally public and congressional support for a resolute and forward policy in Vietnam. This analogy is designed to stress the identity, not the similarity, of Hitler and Mao Tse-tung; of the Nazi German and the Communist Chinese political systems and foreign policy objectives as well as methods; and of the externally incited subversion as well as the strategic significance of Czechoslovakia and South Vietnam. The negative but normative lesson should be self-evident: no self-respecting Mr. Everyman should want a Chamberlain or Daladier in the White House who by surrendering South Vietnam to the Chinese masterminded and controlled North Vietnamese and Vietcong would encourage Peking to activate its timetable for aggressive expansion into Southeast Asia and beyond.

Needless to say, government critics, including professional historians, have excelled in exposing the flaws in this Munich-Vietnam analogy. They have sought to demonstrate that the South Vietnamese insurgency, unlike the Sudeten insurgency, is essentially and authentically indigenous and popular and is directed against a corrupt regime; that South Vietnam, unlike Czechoslovakia, is at best of marginal strategic importance; that Communist China, unlike Hitler Germany, does not appear to be bent on military aggression; and that the United States of the 1960s, unlike the Anglo-French Allies in 1938, has overwhelming military capability in readiness in the event that Peking should, after all, embark on a course of outright military aggression.

But these corrections, though well-grounded, do not come to grips with the pivotal assumption underlying the Munich parable. Today's anti-appeasers imply that if the Anglo-French statesmen had stood their ground firmly on Czechoslovakia Hitler would have climbed down and the Second World War would have been averted. Quite apart from the fact that such counter-factual events are difficult to prove, this particular proposition is left intentionally vague. Specifically, it begs the question whether for Hitler to desist or delay he would not have had to be confronted with the unequivocal prospect of a two-front war arising from a timely and binding military alliance between the two Western Allies and Soviet Russia, inclusive of arrangements for the transit of Soviet military power through Poland and Rumania.

It is worth noting that many of the critics who rightly question the accuracy of the Administration's interpretation of the nature and purpose of the struggle in South Vietnam tacitly accept its representation of Munich, thereby ignoring or concealing the anti-Communist mainsprings and objectives of Western diplomacy since 1917.

Concern and priority for the containment of Russian Bolshevism and for the maintenance of the domestic status quo significantly influenced many of the provisions in the post-1918 peace treaties which during the thirties quickened Europe's diplomatic and political crisis. Furthermore, this twin concern and priority also significantly conditioned the reticence of England and France to enter into an operative mutual security pact with Moscow either before or immediately following Munich, thereby denying themselves substantial and credible military support for their diplomacy. If the Western powers, now including the United States, eventually combined with the Soviet Union to defeat the Axis, their alliance was in the nature of a momentous but shortlived and precarious political truce in an international

civil war that began in 1917 and resumed before the Second World War was over. In this larger perspective not only Munich but also the Nazi-Soviet Pact -- both of which have the outward earmarks of classic moves of power politics in a stable international environment -- are diplomatic maneuvers in an international civil war, with the Second World War and the extermination camps the diabolic wages of revolution and counterrevolution in a preatomic age.

Significantly, today's self-styled anti-appeasers as well as most spokesmen for the left opposition prefer not to go into those aspects of Munich and appeasement which stem from the anti-Soviet and anti-Communist texture of inter-war politics and diplomacy, and for good reasons. After all, the one dimensional lesson of Munich -- stand fast, refuse to negotiate, rearm, and prevent war -- figured prominently in Washington's justificatory and explanatory rhetoric from 1945 to 1956. Specifically, successive administrations proclaimed that since the nature, dynamics, and objectives of Stalin and the Soviet system were analogous to, if not identical with Hitler and the Nazi system, the only way to contain expansionist Russia and surging Bolshevism in third countries was to stand up to Stalin as the Allies should have stood up to Hitler. As of 1948-49 even A.D.A. democrats, not to speak of allegedly scholarly historians and political scientists, accepted, legitimized, and propagated the cold war eschatology according to which Nazism and Bolshevism were essentially identical totalitarian systems bent on unlimited expansion by a crude blend of outright military force and externally engineered subversion. Presently it became the American consensus that even though the Marshall Plan contributed significantly to the removal of those economic and social grievances which fed the Communist conspiracy in so many European countries, in the last analysis superweapons and NATO kept Stalin's Red hordes from sweeping across the Elbe.

Paradoxically most of the Establishment critics of President Johnson's Vietnam policy cling to this time-bound interpretation of the nature and purpose of the Soviet Russian threat, the Communist insurgency, and American containment. They seem to be saying that though Stalinist Russia was blatantly expansionist, militarist, and interventionist, Maoist China is launched on an altogether more prudential course; though European Communism was monolithic and Moscow-controlled, Asian Communism is polycentric and independent of Peking; though Communism in Greece, France, and Italy was an externally fostered conspiracy, Communism in Vietnam is an authentically indigenous rebellion; and though American containment in Europe was defensive, in Asia this containment policy is aggressive. Behind this polyphonic position lurks the questionable assurance that provided a Communist revolution is indigenous rather than externally instigated and controlled the United States has not and will not intervene militarily to either thwart or overthrow it.

In actual fact the similarities between the origins, dynamics, and purposes of the confrontation of the so-called Free World and the so-called Communist World in Europe and Asia are so striking that it is somewhat puzzling as to why neither the Administration nor its critics have avowed them. For it would seem that with due allowance for specific dissimilarities, the intervention in Greece is the most striking and meaningful positive analogue to the intervention in Vietnam. Historians are beginning to note that in Greece Stalin played a reticent role, not unlike Mao Tse-tung in Vietnam today; that the Greek guerrillas were thoroughly indigenous, not unlike the Vietcong today; and that Tito, rather than Stalin, most eagerly

supported the insurgency from across the border, not unlike Ho Chi Minh rather than Mao today. As for American policy, both then and now Washington intervened primarily with sea and sea-borne air power coupled with a military mission, in one case in the wake of British retrenchment, in the other of French retrenchment. After 1945, President Truman and his advisers capitalized on Soviet Russia's momentary military and economic incapacity to risk supporting the Greek revolutionaries, just as since the mid-1950s Washington has taken advantage of Communist China's glaring but impermanent weakness. And last, whereas for the benefit of Congress and of Mr. Everyman President Truman invoked the so-called domino theory to warn of the disastrous consequences of a Communist breakthrough in Greece for the nearby Middle East as well as for France and Italy, so today President Johnson invokes the same domino theory to warn of the consequences of a Communist breakthrough in Vietnam for nearby Southeast Asia and the developing nations beyond.

Vital official and private archives for the study of the origins of the Cold War continue to be inaccessible. Even so, there is sufficient evidence to postulate that because of Stalin's caution and Tito's backdown, in Greece America was spared the test of the length to which she was prepared to go to defeat revolutionary insurgency. Once the Marshall Plan and NATO were erected on the foundations of the Truman Doctrine, the Greek operation was hailed with the same enthusiasm and rationale with which the American-supported restoration in Western and Central Europe was celebrated. Following the defeat of the Wallace movement, the shift to strident anti-Communism by the non-Communist left, and the ravages of McCarthyism, few critics remained to question the assumptions, the methods, the costs, and the results of this containment crusade in Europe. Greece was the only country in which guerrilla forces had to be defeated. But even there, quite apart from the rapid victory, others did the fighting, America's contribution being confined to the offshore fleet, the Van Fleet military mission, and financial support. In the rest of Europe - including "pacified" Greece - the American intervention took the form of deliberate and massive economic, technical, and military assistance. Even though American divisions were stationed on the continent, they never went into action and the Berlin airlift further encouraged the assumption that air power would be decisive in limited as well as in general war. As for Korea, there the international civil war was fought across rather than within fixed boundaries, so that even that bloody war failed to confront Americans, including liberal Americans, with the realities of guerrilla warfare. For quite some time Americans could tell themselves that only the English, the French, the Dutch, and the Belgians fought guerrillas -- who at the time were also vilified as externally stimulated or controlled Communists by their enemies -- in their last ditch struggle for the preservation of empire. Quite naturally many Americans, including John F. Kennedy, were outraged by and denounced the barbarous methods of counter-insurgency and pacification in overseas territories. Before long, however, these transgressions were legitimized as part of the wages of ordered decolonization from above.

Throughout NATO Europe, except in Greece, this restorative containment of Communism, pump primed by American economic aid, paved the way for significant and rapid improvements in per capita income and welfare, with the result that the sources for revolutionary agitation were quickly and effectively undercut. But now that the battlefield of the Cold War has shifted away from Europe the question arises whether this containment strategy, so appealing to the anti-Communist left,

will work in pre-modern societies, including Greece, where development is held back or blocked by rapid population growth, adverse terms of trade, and, above all, ossified political and social elites. Or will the containment of Communism, which has been and continues to be central to America's world project, require interventionist means and methods which will be increasingly difficult to square with the reformist persuasion? The Bay of Pigs, the Cuban missile crisis, and the war in Vietnam (as well as the coup in Indonesia?) suggest that the iron fist of counter-revolution is beginning to show through the velvet glove of Point Four and the Alliance for Progress.

Why this crescendo of violence, notably in Vietnam? Notwithstanding an occasional call for a turn to isolationism, America does not seem to be on the verge of resigning her role as the chief architect, carrier, and coordinator of anti-Communism, a role she has played with consummate skill and unprecedented success since 1945. At the present time the crisis managers in Washington, who rigidly adhere to the anti-revolutionary assumptions underlying America's world mission and project, are searching for a containment formula that will work in the developing countries, many of which hover on the brink of grave internal disturbances. In this sense, Vietnam is not only an execrable and taxing civil war but also a critical testing ground for political and military strategies of revolution and counterrevolution.

Particularly when placed into the context of this century's international civil war, whose primary battlefield has shifted to non-modernized, semi-colonial, and ex-colonial countries, the similarities of the Greek and Vietnamese situations are rather striking. The question arises, therefore, as to why the Greece-Vietnam analogy has not been enlisted either by the Administration or by the Establishment opposition on the left.

For the Administration to use it publicly would be to give too much away. The Greece-Vietnam analogy would lend credence to Mao's interpretation of the instrumental and experimental nature of the Vietnam conflict in America's -- as also in China's -- project; it would exacerbate Moscow's embarrassment vis-à-vis Peking; and it would serve notice to a restless Afro-American population that counterrevolutionary forays and wars on poverty in the third world are likely to continue taking precedence over the war on poverty in America.

In turn, the Greece-Vietnam analogy presents grave difficulties for liberal action intellectuals like Schlesinger and Galbraith. From the very start they, too, portrayed the Cold War as a battle between light and darkness, insisting that the underlying thrust and the ultimate purpose of containment were not only politically libertarian but also economically and socially reformist. With the anti-Communist left in Europe they canonized the Marshall Plan. For a while they balked at the galloping military build-up, criticized the rearmament of Germany, and protested the inclusion of Spain in the military system of the Atlantic world. Before long, however, they rationalized such restorative and conservative costs and consequences of containment, whether intended or unintended, by simply moving their vital center further to the right. In Western and Central Europe, as also in America, Schlesinger and Galbraith increasingly trusted in corporate and welfare capitalism to provide the sinews for consensus politics.

But not only Greece -- as the recent coups demonstrate -- but also many of the developing countries lack the political integration, the social cohesion, and the economic sinews to sustain gradual and ordered modernization and reform, even with considerable foreign aid. In particular, throughout the developing world, whenever the left -- whether reformist or revolutionary -- threatens or seems to threaten the status quo, significant components of the ruling political classes switch from tolerating or cooperating with the center-left to praetorian guards which, at a minimum, undertake to uphold order. Not only the local grandees but also important segments of the entrepreneurial and professional middle classes have good reason to assume that Washington wishes them and the military to err on the side of caution. In fact, the most retrograde elements are so confident that Washington considers them essential backstops to order that with impunity they block those ameliorative structural reforms which Washington normally should like to see implemented in exchange for aid.

In conclusion, when historical analogies are used for political purposes professional and professorial historians have an obligation to correct and qualify them, as they have done with the Munich-Vietnam analogy. But historians who at the same time are critics of power have the additional obligation to raise analogic controversies to a level where they stimulate and enhance meaningful political discourse and debate. The opaque censure of the Johnson Administration's one-dimensional Munich-Vietnam analogy at best has made a marginal contribution to the critical examination and assessment of America's course in Vietnam. The Greece-Vietnam analogy, for its part, could conceivably throw a more intense searchlight on the context and implications of the Vietnamese crisis. Though it has not been invoked publicly, perhaps for fear of quickening congressional and public skepticism and distrust of the direction and design of America's post-war foreign policy, the Greece-Vietnam analogy may well have guided the inner circle of the Johnson Administration in setting and maintaining its course in Vietnam.

At any rate, as long as historical analogies are used and abused, in public as well as in camera, historians are bound by professional oath to step forth to correct them. In addition, some historians claim that this same oath enjoins them to also act as fiercely independent critics of government policies and of reigning orthodoxies. It is by correcting and criticizing the uses and abuses of history that historians mount that "true vigil at arms" to which Croce summoned them and in which he wisely insisted there was "no use for either narcotics or intoxicants."